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SOCIALISM = = = =

BY BROOKE FOSS WESTCOTT
LATE BISHOP OF DURHAM

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The Christian Social Union

President:

THE BISHOP OF BIRMINGHAM

THIS Union consists of Members of the Church of England who have the following objects at heart :—

1. To claim for the Christian law the ultimate authority to rule social practice.
2. To study in common how to apply the moral truths and principles of Christianity to the social and economic difficulties of the present time.
3. To present Christ in practical life as the living Master and King, the enemy of wrong and selfishness, the power of righteousness and love.

SOCIALISM

BY

BROOKE FOSS WESTCOTT

LATE BISHOP OF DURHAM

IT is not my intention to discuss in this paper any of the representative types of Socialism—the paternal Socialism of Owen, or the State Socialism of Bismarck, the international Socialism of Marx, or the Christian Socialism of Maurice, or the evolutionary Socialism of the *Fabian Essays*. I wish rather to consider the essential idea which gave, or still gives, vitality and force to these different systems, to indicate the circumstances which invest the idea with paramount importance at the present time, and especially to commend it to the careful study of the younger clergy.

The term Socialism has been discredited by its connection with many extravagant and revolutionary schemes, but it is a term which needs to be claimed for nobler uses. It has no necessary affinity with any forms of violence, or confiscation, or class selfishness, or financial arrangement. I shall therefore venture to employ it apart from its historical associations as describing a theory of life, and not only a theory of economics. In this sense Socialism is the opposite of Individualism, and it is by contrast with Individualism that the true character of Socialism can best be discerned. Individualism and Socialism correspond with opposite views of humanity. Individualism regards humanity as made up of disconnected or warring atoms; Socialism regards it as an organic whole, a vital unity formed by the combination of contributory members mutually inter-dependent.

It follows that Socialism differs from Individualism both in method and in aim. The method of Socialism is co-operation,

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the method of Individualism is competition. The one regards man as working with man for a common end, the other regards man as working against man for private gain. The aim of Socialism is the fulfilment of service, the aim of Individualism is the attainment of some personal advantage, riches, or place, or fame. Socialism seeks such an organization of life as shall secure for every one the most complete development of his powers; Individualism seeks primarily the satisfaction of the particular wants of each one in the hope that the pursuit of private interest will in the end secure public welfare.

If men were perfect, with desires and powers harmoniously balanced, both lines of action would lead to the same end. As it is, however, experience shows that limitations must be placed upon the self-assertion of the single man. The growing sense of dependence as life becomes more and more complex necessarily increases the feeling of personal obligation which constrains us each to look to the circumstances of others. At the same time in the intercourse of a fuller life we learn that our character is impoverished in proportion as we are isolated, and we learn also that evil or wrong in one part of society makes itself felt throughout the whole.

But if we admit the central idea of Socialism, that the goal of human endeavour is the common well-being of all alike, sought through conditions which provide for the fullest culture of each man, as opposed to the special development of a race, or a class, by the sacrifice of others in slavery or serfdom or necessary subjection, it does not follow that the end can be reached only in one way. The powers of men are different, and equal development does not involve equality. Experience will direct and confirm reform, for life is manifold. But a common end will hallow individuality for more effective service. The single man will not be sacrificed to the society. He will be enabled to bring to it the offering of his disciplined powers and so to realize his freedom.

Socialism, as I have defined it, is not, I repeat committed to any one line of action, but every one who accepts its central thought will recognize certain objects for immediate effort. He will seek to secure that labour shall be acknowledged in its

proper dignity as the test of manhood, and that its reward shall be measured, not by the necessities of the indigent, but by its actual value as contributing to the wealth of the community. He will strive to place masses of men who have no reserve of means in a position of stability and to quicken them by generous ideas. He will be bold to proclaim that the evils of luxury and penury cannot be met by palliatives. He will claim that all should confess in action that every power, every endowment, every possession, is not of private use, but a trust to be administered in the name of the Father for their fellow-men.

Such view of the social destiny of the individual, with all he has, is brought home to us at the present time by the conception which we have gained of the evolution, or rather of the providential ordering of life. There have been, from very early times, dreams of ideal states fashioned by great thinkers who felt how far the world in which they lived fell short of the society for which man was made. They looked within for the laws of their imaginary commonwealths. We have at length a surer guide for our hopes in the records of the past. Studying the course which history has taken, we can forecast the future, for the broad outline of human discipline is clear. In the Old World the ruling thought was the dignity of a race or of a class, to which all beside, in a greater or less degree, were made to minister. In the New World, ushered in by the Advent, the ruling thought has been the dignity of man as man, of men as men, and however imperfectly the great truth revealed in the Incarnation has been grasped and embodied, still it has in some sense been brought home to the West little by little through many lessons.

At first in the middle ages the society was dominant, ordered in a hierarchy of classes: then at the Reformation the individual claimed independence, and the voice of authority was followed by the voice of reason. Now, when the complexity of life baffles purely rational analysis, theoretical freedom has been found to degenerate into anarchy: and we catch sight of a fuller harmony in which the offices of the society and of the citizen, of tradition and conscience, shall be reconciled.

Functions which were once combined have been sharply separated as a step towards a more complete union. For here also the law of a higher life has been fulfilled, and the parts of the body have been differentiated, so that their dependence one upon another may be seen in its beneficent operation. In order to deal rightly with these new conditions we must fix our attention on facts and not on words. The permanence of technical terms often tends to mislead. The modern conceptions of capital and trade, for example, or rather isolated facts which foreshadowed them, usury and buying to sell again, were repugnant to mediæval religious feeling; but now that the range of production and distribution has been indefinitely extended we have to face problems which mediæval experience could not anticipate and cannot help us to solve. Even in the last century capitalist, producer, and consumer were not unfrequently united. If each of these three classes has now been sharply distinguished and hitherto kept apart by conflicting material interests, it is, if we may trust the teachings of the past, that they may in due time be brought together again in a full, free, and chosen fellowship. The relations which exist between them at present are modern and transitional. **Wage-labour, though it appears to be an inevitable step in the evolution of society, is as little fitted to represent finally or adequately the connection of man with man in the production of wealth as at earlier times slavery or serfdom.**

Our position, then, is one of expectancy and preparation, but we can see the direction of the social movement. We wait for the next stage in the growth of the State, when in full and generous co-operation each citizen shall offer the fullness of his own life that he may rejoice in the fullness of the life of the body.

Such an issue may appear to be visionary. It is, I believe, far nearer than we suppose. It is at least the natural outcome of what has gone before. Society has been organized effectively, without regard to the individual. The individual has been developed in his independence. It remains to show how the richest variety of individual differences can be made to fulfil the noblest ideal of the State, when fellow-labourers seek in

the whole the revelation or the true meaning of their separate offerings. And nothing has impressed me more during my years of work than the rapidity and power with which the thoughts of dependence and solidarity and brotherhood, of our debt to the past and our responsibility for the future, have spread among our countrymen.

Men have grown familiar with the principle of combination for limited objects. Such unions are a discipline for a larger fellowship. There is, indeed, enough to sadden us in the selfishness which too often degrades rich and poor alike, but self-respect has grown widely among those who are poor in material wealth. The consciousness of a high calling has quickened to self-denial and a noble activity many who are oppressed with the burden of great possessions. There is on all sides an increasingly glad recognition of duties answering to opportunities; and if education has created or deepened the desire for reasonable leisure, it has opened springs of enjoyment which riches cannot make more healthy or more satisfying.

At the same time our public wealth is quickly accumulating. Buildings, galleries, gardens, bring home to every Englishman that he has an inheritance in the grandeur of his country; and the English family still guards in honour the fundamental types of human communion and fatherhood and brotherhood, which are a sufficient foundation for a kingdom of God. All things, indeed, once more are ready, and a clear call is given to us to prove our faith.

Here, then, lies the duty of the Christian teacher. The thoughts of a true Socialism—the thoughts that men are “one man” in Christ, sons of God and brethren, suffering and rejoicing together, that each touches all and all touch each with an inevitable influence, that as we live by others we can find no rest till we live for others, are fundamental thoughts of the Law and the Prophets, of the Gospels and the Epistles, which he is empowered and bound to make effective under the conditions of modern life.

The result is that reflection and experience have at length made them intelligible. To interpret and embody them in

a practical form is the office of believers now. They must show that Christianity, which has dealt hitherto with the individual, deals also with the State, with classes, with social conditions, and not only with personal character. In the endeavour to fulfil this duty the past will help them by analogy, but not by example. New questions cannot be settled by tradition. There is an order in the accomplishment of the divine counsel. Even great evils are not met and conquered at once.

Discerning our own work, we shall not condemn or blame our fathers that they did not anticipate it. They did more or less perfectly the work that was prepared for them to do. We are required not to repeat their service, but, enriched and strengthened by what they have won, **to bring the doctrine of the Incarnation to bear upon the dealings of man with man, and of nation with nation.** As we strive to do this we shall come to understand the force of the loftiest truths of theology. We shall find that that which is transcendental is, indeed, practical as a motive, and an inspiration. We alone, I do not scruple to affirm it, we alone, who believe that "The Word became flesh" can keep hope fresh in the face of the sorrows of the world, for we alone know that evil is intrusive and remediable; we alone know that the victory over the world has been won, and that we have to gather with patience the fruits of the victory. Violence can destroy, but it cannot construct. Love destroys the evil when it replaces the evil by the good.

But while we affirm the absolute supremacy of the spiritual and the universal sovereignty of Christ reigning from the Cross, we remember that our work must be done under the conditions of earth, and that it is here on the sordid field of selfish conflicts that we must prepare the kingdom of God. At the same time, we recognize that the social problem of to-day, the relations of capital and labour, belongs especially to Englishmen, who, by their national character, have ruled the development of modern industry. As Englishmen have set the problem, so on Englishmen lies the responsibility of solving it. And the position of the English clergy gives them peculiar opportunities for moderating

with wise faith discussions which will open the way for the solution. The clergy of the National Church are not a close and isolated caste: they are drawn from every class: they are trained in sympathy with every variety of thought and culture: they are in habitual contact with all forms of experience: they are lifted above the influence of party by the greatness of their work: they are enabled to labour for a distant end by the greatness of the Faith which they proclaim.

I ask, then—I ask myself, not without sorrowful perplexity—whether we have, in view of the teaching of present facts, considered what God's counsel for men in creation and redemption is? **Whether the state of things in our towns and in our villages either answers or tends to answer the divine idea?** Whether the present distribution of wealth is not perilous alike to those who have and to those who want? Whether we have not accepted the laws of the material order as the laws of all nature? Whether we have pondered over the moral significance of the poor, and whether we have reflected on the wider application of that principle which it is the glory of medicine to have guarded, that every discovery affecting man's well-being is the property of the race, and not of the finder?

I do not enter now on any questions of detail. I desire simply to direct attention to questions which go to the very heart of the Gospel; and I beg the younger clergy, with whatever strength of persuasion I can command, to think over these things: to discuss them with one another reverently and patiently; to seek to understand and not to silence their adversaries; to win for themselves the truth which gives to error what permanence it has; to remember that bold and sweeping statements come more commonly from doubt or ignorance than from just conviction. But I beg them not to improvise hasty judgments. The personal value of an opinion depends for the most part upon the pains which have been spent in forming it. Zeal, enthusiasm, devotion are not enough to guide us in the perplexity of conduct; we need above all things knowledge as the basis of action. We have not yet mastered the elements of the problems of society. Theories have been formed from the examination

of groups of isolated phenomena; but life is complex. We must, indeed, see our end before we begin our work; but it may be that different ways will be found to lead to it, and as far as I can judge the social question of our day will finally receive not one answer, but many. But in one respect all the answers will agree; all will be religious.

Meanwhile, our office as Christian teachers is to proclaim the ideal of the Gospel, and to form opinion. And if we do this, if we confess that our mission is to hasten a kingdom of God on earth, and if we ourselves move resolutely forward as the Spirit guides us, I believe that we shall find through the common offices of our daily intercourse that peace which springs out of the consciousness of common sacrifice made for one end, and that assurance of strength which comes through new victories of faith.

We cannot doubt that God is calling us in this age, through the characteristic teachings of science and of history, to seek a new social application of the Gospel. We cannot doubt, therefore, that it is through our obedience to the call that we shall realize its divine power. The proof of Christianity which is prepared by God, as I believe, for our times, is a Christian society filled with one spirit in two forms—righteousness and love.

Any one wishing to join the C.S.U. is asked to communicate with the Hon. Sec., the Rev. J. Carter, Pusey House, Oxford, or the Sec. of the Local Branch, if there be one.

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